CHAPTER V

Family

The family among the Georgian Highlanders represents an exogamous social unit which is patrilineal in descent, and patrilocal.

The form and composition of the family is not the same among the different groups of Georgian Highlanders. Among the Khevsurs, who leave the parental home at once after marriage, the family consists usually of a married couple and their children. Among the Pshavs, who are not partisans of division, the married brothers and their aged parents often live together, forming large families, which may be regarded as a remnant of the joint-family which was present in the whole Georgian Kingdom in time past. The same phenomenon is to be found also among the Svans, where individual brothers live together, forming a large homestead.

The father is the head of the family. In times past, the father was not only the head in the economic life of the family, but he was also its spiritual leader. The center of the home worship was the house hearth. The hearth and the iron chain suspended over it, called *sakideli*, and fire in general, were believed to be endowed with special supernatural power. On these beliefs are founded customs regarding fire as a cleansing and purifying agent, and the walking around the hearth during the wedding ceremony of the Pshavs.[1] The wife and children are subordinate to the father, obeying all his orders. His power and his rights over his children are manifested especially in the marriage procedures, where parental approval was necessary; most of the business of choosing the bride, matchmaking and bethrothal are accomplished by the parents without asking the consent of the young people. The power of the father is greater among the Svans than among the other groups of Georgian Highlanders. It is clearly expressed in the custom of infanticide which was practiced formerly in

[1] See Chapter VI, on Marriage.

6: Grigolia E-4, 5 (no date) 1939 RI1 Georgia RI1

It is interesting to note the information given by Professor Kovalevsky, which exposes the group ownership of the Pshavs.[12] He relates that during his visit to the country he found an interesting combination of property rights of a nation, of the community, and of the separate family. For example, the forest was in common possession of the whole Pshav nation, the pasture ground was the property of communities which composed the nation, and the arable land was in the hands of each family, private or joint; and as there seldom was a division of the family, the property did not change hands but remained in the same family. Contrary to the Pshavs, division of the family was a general occurrence with the Khevsurs, and had as a consequence the division of property and the poverty of the people. At once, after his marriage, every Khevsur usually separates from his father and brothers and begins life for himself.[13] In contrast to this, the wealth of the Pshavs, who are not partisans of family division, was much greater than that of their neighbors. Among the Pshavs and Tushes were even such rich persons who possessed from 40,000 to 50,000 rubles, which they usually buried in the ground. As for the Khevsurs, they possess few cattle and are generally very poor.[14] Their property is very limited. A family is considered wealthy which owns as many as fourteen or fifteen cows, four or five oxen, two or three horses, and a mule. Their principal wealth is in arms, which are highly valued, and in copper vessels; money is very scarce.[15]

The government of the Georgian kingdom opposed the division of the family and favored its preservation, for it regarded the joint ownership of families as beneficial to the members of the families themselves as well as to the whole kingdom whose subjects they were. Thus, in the Georgian Code of King Vakhtang VI[16] we find passages encouraging the preservation of joint families and discouraging the partition and breaking up of family groups. The economic profit resulting from such organizations

[12] Kovalevsky: a, II, 84.
[13] Eristov: 111.
[14] Eristov: 124.
[15] Zisserman: 213.
[16] Vakhtang's Code.